

# This Is Kolchak

The First American Study  
of the Strong Man of Russia

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## Russia Looks to Former Commander of Black Sea Fleet to Restore Order

The former United States Consul at Omsk, Siberia, who returned to America last week, brought with him an account of Bolshevik atrocities which caused much comment when printed in the daily newspapers. His association with Admiral Kolchak gave him unusual opportunities for the following sketch of the Russian leader.

**B**Y A CURIOUS coincidence I arrived at Omsk on November 18, 1918, the eventful day that Admiral Alexander Vasilievich Kolchak was called to the head of the so-called all-Russian Provisional Government. I had come from Irkutsk in company with Consul General E. L. Harris to establish a United States consulate at Omsk.

During the following six months I held the post of United States consul at Omsk and was in daily contact with the government there, which, after the coup d'état that occurred on November 18, became known as the Siberian government.

The three weeks preceding my departure on May 4 for the United States were spent in visiting the southern sector of the Siberian front. I have set down my impressions of the Siberian government; Kolchak, its recognized head, and the stirring events which transpired in Siberia during my tenure of office as United States consul at Omsk.

In September, 1918, Siberia had been cleared of the Bolsheviks by the Czech-Slovaks. Scattered members of the former constituent assembly, which had been dispersed at Petrograd in January of that year by Bolshevik bayonets, assembled in convention at Ufa, a Russian city near the Siberian border.

This convention gave birth to the so-called all-Russian provisional government. The executive powers of this government lay in the hands of a directorate consisting of five men: Avksentiev, Socialist, president of the directorate; Zenzinov and Vologodsky, Socialists; Vinogradov, Constitutional Democrat, and Boldyrev, non-party. In this government Admiral Kolchak was given the portfolio of minister of war. A short while after the inception of the all-Russian provisional government its residence was changed from Ufa to Omsk.

### Siberia Unprotected

It must be remembered that at this time Siberia had no army fighting the Bolsheviks and the protection of the Siberian people against these forces of disorder and plunder rested entirely in the hands of the Czech-Slovaks. In the newly formed all-Russian provisional government there were two important factions—on the one hand those who wished to compromise with the Bolsheviks and on the other those who no longer entertained any illusion concerning the illegal and criminal character of the Bolshevik government or régime and who were, consequently, opposed to any idea of union with it.

The president of the directorate, Avksentiev, and his Socialist colleague, Zenzinov, were known to be members of the Social Revolutionists' central committee at Moscow, which was rapidly approaching union with the Bolsheviks, and it soon became evident that these two members of the directorate were under the control of this committee. Due to this situation, the policy of the directorate from the day it took power was irresolute and vacillating, and these two Social Revolutionist members had, up to November 18, completely blocked any constructive efforts on the part of the government toward forming an army in Siberia to oppose Bolshevism.

The impotency of the all-Russian provisional government, as then constituted, caused general and widespread discontent among the Siberian people. In spite of the vigorous protests of the minority members of the directorate, the all-Russian provisional government had, on November 6, sent two emissaries, i. e., Chernov, Socialist and president of the former Constituent Assembly, and Volsky, likewise a Socialist member of that historic body, to a conference with the Bolsheviks at Ekaterinburg, with the purpose of effecting a union with them. Although this conference failed of the results unquestionably desired by Avksentiev and Zenzinov, it is worth noting that Chernov, their chosen emissary, never returned to Omsk, but aligned himself with the Bolsheviks, and now enjoys the honors and emoluments pertaining to the office of Bolshevik commissar at Moscow.

Such instances of duplicity gave basis to the charge against these two Social Revolutionist members of the directorate, that they were frustrating all attempts of the Constitutional Democrats and of other elements of the all-Russian provisional government to create an army capa-

ble of safeguarding the Siberian people against the return of Bolshevism. This was proved conclusively when, after the coup d'état of November 18, the Social Revolutionists' central committee at Moscow, to which Avksentiev and Zenzinov had rendered obedience, immediately coalesced with the Bolshevik central committee, presided over by Lenine, Trotsky, et al.

### When Armistice Came

The unsettled state of affairs in Siberia was brought to a sharp crisis by the signing of the armistice between the Allied and Central Powers on November 11. Almost immediately upon the announcement that the armistice had been signed the Czech-Slovak soldiers, to whom the Siberian people up to that time had owed their security, declared openly that they would no longer remain in Siberia and fight the Russians' battles. The news of the avowed intention of the Czech-Slovaks to withdraw from Siberia created a general panic among the Siberian people, to whom the return of Bolshevism, with all of its attendant horrors, seemed imminent and inevitable. In the presence of this grave peril, a group of Russian officers, on the night of November 17, the day preceding our arrival at Omsk, arrested Avksentiev, president of the directorate, and his associate, Zenzinov, and emphatically demanded that the whole power of the Siberian government be lodged with one strong man, who could, with the greatest possible dispatch, reorganize the scattered bands of Russian soldiers into an army, which could take the place at the Siberian front of the retiring Czech-Slovaks and save Siberia from a second deluge of Bolshevism. The situation was obviously critical and charged with the possibility of real disaster. Decisive and effective action was imperative. At a hurriedly called conference between the remaining members of the directorate and the members of the council of ministers, Socialists and Constitutional Democrats alike admitted the impotency of the all-Russian provisional government and unanimously agreed that its whole power ought to be immediately turned over to one man.

### The One Man

One man and one only could be found to whom the sober elements of the all-Russian provisional government and these highly excited Russian officers could agree to bequeath the power of the expiring provisional government and intrust with the task of organizing a new government and creating a new army. That man was Admiral Alexander Vasilievich Kolchak, unquestionably Russia's most popular hero of the war—best known in the United States for his brilliant action in the Black Sea, where, upon the very day of his arrival at Semferopol to take command of the Black Sea fleet, he went out against the two German battleships, Breslau and Göben, and did not return until he had cleared the Black Sea of those two notorious pirates. The achievement was made more noteworthy by the fact that up to the time of Admiral

Kolchak's arrival these two German battleships had operated in the Black Sea entirely unmolested by the former Russian commander, who excused his inaction by stating that he had under his command only relics of the Russo-Japanese war, incapable of giving battle.

### Like John Paul Jones

This exploit of Admiral Kolchak in the Black Sea parallels in American history that of John Paul Jones, who, in command of the worn-out French frigate Bon Homme Richard, made short shrift of the British line ship Serapis.

History also relates how the disorders of the Russian revolution of 1917 were stayed in the Black Sea fleet for two months after the Russian army had completely disintegrated, due entirely to the influence of Admiral Kolchak's personality on his men. At length, when the sailors of the Black Sea fleet, driven mad by the same pernicious German propaganda which had destroyed the Russian army, mutinied and began killing their officers—first breaking their swords before their eyes and tearing off their epaulettes—their

great respect for Admiral Kolchak saved him from a similar fate. His great love for his motherland left him no choice but to accept this power and responsibility, which he had not sought but would not now attempt to evade—the almost superhuman task of bringing order out of chaos engendered by the duplicity of Avksentiev and Zenzinov and completed by the coup d'état executed by Russian officers on November 18.

With characteristic promptness, Admiral Kolchak set about at once to reorganize the government which is now known as the Siberian government and to create a Russian army which could replace at the Siberian front the Czech-Slovaks, who since the signing of the armistice had been obsessed with the one idea of returning to their beloved Bohemia after four years of unremitting toil and struggle in Russia and Siberia. The writer recalls how at this unsettled time Consul General Harris held a conference with his staff in the International Harvester Building at Omsk, the offices of which had been turned over to the United States

government for use as a consulate, to discuss the advisability of remaining in Omsk should the Czech-Slovaks carry out their avowed intention to withdraw. None of us at that time could believe it possible for Admiral Kolchak and the Siberian government to gather dependable forces to replace the Czechs and stem the tide of Bolshevism which threatened to engulf Siberia once more the moment the Czechs should leave.

As in the early days of the revolution, Admiral Kolchak's genius for leadership again proved a decisive factor. The scattered bands of Russian troops in Western Siberia rallied under that leadership and a few days later resolutely took the place of the Czech-Slovak soldiers at the Siberian front. From this time onward the Czech-Slovaks confined their activities entirely to guarding the Transsiberian Railway, their one means of exit from Siberia. Americans and other foreigners at that time in Omsk were amazed at the feat that Admiral Kolchak had accomplished. Nor is it surprising that he at once became immensely popular with us, for a few days be-

fore we had not known at what moment Bolshevism might overtake us and we would find ourselves, like Consul Tredwell at Tashkent, languishing in a foul and pestilential Bolshevik prison.

**A Draft in Siberia**  
The army of the Siberian government steadily increased in numbers, and the improvement in the discipline of its troops as displayed by those we saw daily in Omsk was as rapid as was the army's growth. It may not be generally known that in April the Siberian government, under Admiral Kolchak's leadership, was sufficiently strong actually to carry out a draft among the literate Russians throughout the whole of Siberia with as few disorders as attended the execution of our own draft law in the summer of 1917. His army at the time I left Omsk numbered 450,000 men.

That part of Siberia which lies between the Ural mountains and Lake Baikal, a territory as large as European Russia, in November, 1918, recognized the authority of the Kolchak government. Shortly thereafter General Denikin, leader of the patriotic forces in Southern Russia struggling against the Bolsheviks, and Tschakovsky, head of the government of North Russia at Archangel, wireless to Admiral Kolchak their recognition of his authority and expressed the hope that a junction between their respective forces might be promptly effected. On March 17, 1919, the junction between the Siberian forces and those of the Archangel government was accomplished. The forces of Admiral Kolchak and General Denikin, though not yet united, are, at this writing, approaching each other at a rate of speed which promises their early union.

## Head of All-Russian Provisional Government Has Had a Career of Action

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The part of Siberia east of Lake Baikal which stretches toward Japan, was less prompt in its acceptance of the Kolchak government. In this region half-breed chiefs, such as Semenov and Kalmikoff, surrounded by their followers—admittedly furnished with money and ammunition by Japan—for a long time worked against the further territorial extension of the Kolchak government, absolutely refusing to subject themselves to its orders.

There ensued a long diplomatic struggle between the Kolchak government and the Japanese, who, despite their temporary unfriendliness to the Kolchak government, were rendering a great service to the Russian people of Eastern Siberia in protecting their railways and saving them from Bolshevik attacks. This diplomatic struggle resulted in victory for the Kolchak government, Japan finally conceding stability to it and admitting its rightful claim to control Eastern as well as Western Siberia. Thereupon, to the high credit of the Japanese government, it refused all further aid to such men as Semenov and Kalmikoff until they should openly and frankly acknowledge their full obedience to the government at Omsk. In these circumstances the full recognition of the Kolchak government was at once accorded by the military leaders of Eastern Siberia.

### Visiting Kolchak

My first call on Admiral Kolchak—followed by numerous others, as the United States had no diplomatic representative at Omsk, and during most of my official residence there I was sole American consular of-

ficer—was made in company with Consul General Harris shortly after the admiral's return to Omsk in response to the telegram already referred to, which caused him to undertake the reorganization of the Siberian government. He received us in the immense Railway Administration Building at Omsk which had been taken over by the Siberian army and which was at that time his official residence. The admiral sat behind a massive, severely plain oak desk in a spacious though scantily furnished room on the second floor. He was dressed in a uniform of extreme simplicity, with but one insignia, consisting of a gold star suspended from the collar of his coat—the highest order of the Cross of St. George.

What the business men of Siberia think of Admiral Kolchak's government was forcibly impressed upon me by my friend Mr. Adam Leya, of Omsk, longtime Russian representative of the International Harvester Company, and who at the present time, in addition to his duties with the company, is honorary treasurer of the western division of the American Red Cross in Siberia. Mr. Leya stated that although he had never taken part in public life, yet as an intelligent and patriotic Russian citizen he had closely studied the events in Siberia since the 1917 revolution, and that, having known the black despair of Bolshevism, he was once more filled with hope by the wise and sound administration of Admiral Kolchak, which presaged to him that Russia would soon master the forces of disorder within her borders. He declared unreservedly that notwithstanding the incompleteness of the reorganization of Siberia's economic and political life which Admiral Kolchak and his government have undertaken, Siberia at the present moment is enjoying the best government it has ever had in all its history.

### A Visit to the Front

About the middle of April, immediately prior to my return to the United States, I spent three weeks visiting the southern sector of the Siberian front—1,600 miles to the west of Omsk and well into western European Russia. My journey lay through Ufa, a populous Russian city in the foothills of the Ural Mountains, which had but a month before been freed from the Bolsheviks. There I interviewed men and women of all shades of political opinion and learned how Admiral Kolchak represented to them not only government but a liberation from plunder, rapine and assassination which they suffered under the Bolshevik régime. From Ufa I advanced 150 miles further into Western Russia.

My journey ended in the village of Belebei, county seat of Belebei County, Ufa government. Belebei had been rescued from the Bolsheviks only a few days before, and its inhabitants were still gasping from the horrors of the nightmare through which it had passed. There, at every turn, I heard Admiral Kolchak's name coupled only with words of praise and tearful affection. Horrible beyond description were the stories that the inhabitants of Belebei related to me of Bolshevik brutality and ferocity, most of which would have been incredible had I not by chance witnessed with my own eyes the victims of the diabolical outrages perpetrated by the Bolsheviks the night they retired from the town. But this is a story in itself too harrowing to be reproduced here, though the photographs that I made of these unhappy victims of Bolshevik violence are still in my possession and make mute appeal for help against such insensate barbarity.

The world has at last awakened to the determined and orderly efforts of Admiral Kolchak and his government to put an end to Bolshevism in the land of its birth. Official statements recently published disclose a desire on the part of the Allies to render him material aid in his heavy task, the successful accomplishment of which will make of him one of the world's great benefactors. But this tardy acknowledgment of his services to his country and humanity—welcome and reassuring as it must be to the long-suffering Russian people and the friends of Russia who have shared with her the hardships and perils of her revolution—will not suffice to clear the conscience of those statesmen who have remained so long unmoved by the travail of a former ally, if they allow themselves to be frightened by Bolsheviks at home into breaking this promise which has filled the hearts of all Russian patriots with a new hope.



Admiral Kolchak

From a photograph brought back by Mr. Embry



The little river of the Belebei, scene of one of the Bolshevik atrocities described by Mr. Embry. Sixteen hostages were thrown into the river and forced down by the Bolsheviks. From a photograph brought from Russia by Mr. Embry